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I've got a few stories involving Brian and I'm not sure where to start, so let's go with the scorcher of an afternoon in 1995 when we were making 'flatmate wanted' adverts on the balcony in Camberwell Church Street, overlooking The Rat Pit. We called it 'The Rat Pit' because it was a big pit with a 20ft drop, littered with rotting mattresses, rusty fridges, spears of broken glass, splintered planks of wood and shattered, chunky '80s TV sets— and crawling with big fat rats.

Brian was a bear of a man; a mid-20s Glasgow Celtic fan from Ventura, California who was bumming around London on a quest for satori and kicks – and lots and lots of drugs. Mostly of the smokable hippy type. I was 19 and an obnoxious little snotrag trying to master the art of desktop publishing.

The sunrays were cooking our bones. Zoe...sorry, *Xøe*, the incredibly shocking, interesting and gifted trustafarian from next door, was topless-sunbathing on her adjoining balcony – *again*. She was pretending to be asleep but peeking to see if we were checking out her breasts. The only things that caught our eyes were her jerky head movements every couple of minutes.

"Let's put this up in the toilet in the Goldsmith's Tavern," I said, scribbling FEEL AT HOME IN HERE? YOU'LL LOVE OUR FLAT! CALL 071 (*WHATEVER OUR NUMBER WAS*) AFTER 6PM. Brian complemented my scrawl with a funny, obscene cartoon of our flatmates, Ben and Moira. What can I say? The joke ad worked – Andy saw it, called and moved in shortly after.

Unfortunately though, this was the afternoon that led to The Great Row That Raged For 10 Months. Drunk on the sunshine and creative boredom, Brian churned out numerous fake ads featuring Ben and Moira, with increasingly unflattering depictions of the Couple From Hell™. In retrospect, we should've taken a snap of their room: it made The Rat Pit look like a penthouse suite.

Though, in *actual* retrospect, we *shouldn't have left the 'ads' lying around* for Moira to discover. It was bad enough living next door to Zoe and her flatmates, Zombie Nick and Spencer; now we were embroiled in a civil war too. Still, £35 a week – what could you expect?

Brian had this great idea for an illustrated book of verse called *Birds And Their Vices*. One entry was a cartoon of a magpie, snorting lines. The rhyme went (this was 25 years ago, so I'm paraphrasing):

The magpie robs your house at night

And if it shines, he'll grab it;

Then sells the lot down the pawn shop

To fund his cocaine habit

except better. Other entries included a gambling owl and a kerb-crawling crow. We had very little money and a lot of time on our hands, so we'd spend days coming up with ideas for 'stuff'. DIY horror films. An actual band. A trip to Prague for the then-infamous 40p bottles of beer. 99.99% of it never happened, of course... but at least we never stooped to free improv.

Right now, though, we had Moira screaming at us. She'd been in a pop video, unlike us jealous losers, so how dare we draw rude cartoons about her. Having this bollocking delivered through a L'Oreal facepack was torture; I'd never wanted to laugh so hard. Ben, never one for confrontation, hid in their pigsty of a bedroom, strumming *Heart Of Gold* (badly) on his acoustic guitar. ☠☠☠

Brian and I were watching our favourite TV show, *999 With Michael Buerk*, blissfully unaware that the electricity meter was only £0.00001 in credit – and ticking...

As Michael narrated a chilling re-enactment of the day West Lothian's first air ambulance hit a power line, the living room wall was rocked by a sonic boom. Zoe was blasting *Territorial Pissings* by Nirvana – *again*. We scrambled into action: Brian searched for the boombox while I ran into my room to find the jungle tape with *Original Nuttah*, *Borderline Mobster* and *RIP* on it. As I came out, I saw Ben and Moira in their dressing gowns, sneaking up the stairs with candles. On spotting me, they lowered their heads and raced into the bathroom.

"FUCK! NO!" I erupted. "BRIAN...BRIAAANNN! THE METER!!!"

I was barely back downstairs when – CLACK. Total blackout. No more Michael Buerk. No boombox counterstrike. Just me and Brian in the dark, and Kurt Cobain roaring through the wall. Ben and Moira would gladly wallow in their own tepid swill and have candlelit tantric bathtub sex 'til someone else went down the 24-hour garage and topped up the meter key. We'd been here before.

"Fucking twats!" I cursed, trying to find the sofa. "Let's just sit in the dark, I don't care! I'm sick of them pulling 'the bathroom trick' every time the meter runs out. They can't stay in there forever."

"Yeah..." Brian said less enthusiastically, as Zoe started to scream along to the grunge racket. "Can I have the last smoke?" he drawled as his eyes suddenly appeared then disappeared above a firefly.

Five minutes later, we were out in the cold, on our way to the garage. I couldn't work out why Brian was so upbeat, so unflappable about it all. I took it *really* personally; insecurity, I guess. I felt like Ben and Moira had made monkeys of us, and it *seriously* rankled. The incident lit paranoid firecrackers that bounced around in my skull. No wonder my girlfriend wouldn't let me move in with her: she looked at me and saw a non-achieving dropkick who'd abandon the barricades at the first whiff of a nicotine craving, no doubt. A sucker hoodwinked into charging the leccy key by a couple of grasping spoilt brats who used stolen pint glasses filled with water as 'ashtrays'. How would I ever secure our dream Barratt Home when I wouldn't even kick in the bathroom door and frogmarch Ben and Moira down the road, towel-wrapped and dripping wet, to recharge the key? Oh God...my girlfriend was secretly planning to dump me for a handsome airline pilot – *it had all become crystal-clear...!*

"Aww, man...you think too much," Brian yawned. "Anyway, this'll cheer you up... ***I wanked in Moira's shampoo.***"

"Really?" I gawped. My self-pity instantly evaporated. There was no possibility of a bottle mix-up: Moira used some coconut-tea-with-a-twist-of-vanilla combination that we were expressly forbidden to touch. Brian's revelation felt like those moments in *Monkey* when Monkey and Piggy would lose their shit and want to fight a village, but the monk Tripitaka would calm them down – only, swap the snippets of Buddhist wisdom for soft-focus images of Moira massaging Brian's manfat into her scalp.

"Fancy a pint?" I beamed, clutching the charged key (£1) and our fags (£3). "No rush back...let 'em stew in the bath!" We went to The Hermit's Cave and stayed 'til closing time. When we got home, Zoe had turned the music off, possibly disappointed that the inter-flat noise war had failed to escalate. The TV sputtered back to life. Ben and Moira sheepishly emerged from the bathroom, looking like aircrash survivors; her hair had a lovely shine to it, I noted. ☠☠☠

Come winter '95 we were so broke, we were shoplifting to eat once a day. So Brian and I joined the Post Office as temps and were dispatched to the sorting centre at Battersea Park, to help handle the mad Xmas rush. We were given two options: the first was the 2pm-10pm shift. The second was the 2pm-10pm shift PLUS the 10pm-6am shift. I signed up for plenty of these latter 16-hour slogs and it was the closest I came to all-out psychosis. Well, apart from last weekend.

Brian got lucky – he got to sit with a small crew of Filipino women who showered him with tea and sweets, and giggled and flirted with him half the night. Meanwhile, I was counting the seconds 'til our 3am fag break while the supervisor demanded to know why my Trinidadian fellow temp, Ray, was lying flat on the floor beneath the sorting belt.

“Mi...sleepy!” Ray retorted, turning over.

“Their flatmate’s moving out – they asked if I wanted to move in with them in the New Year,” Brian smiled smugly, recounting his conversation with the Filipinos, as we sat on the sofa after our first night shift – shivering, smoking fags and watching *The Big Breakfast*. “How was your night?”

Oh, great, I told him. We went outside for our fag break and some temp with a ponytail made a loud-mouthed comment about Rorke’s Drift, and then one of the black full-time posties did a ragga rap and shouted “*Slaughter dis!*” while pointing at *me*... then a bloke with CHELSEA tattooed on his neck told me, at great length, how he wanted to fuck a prozzer up the arse, and a fight broke out because someone changed the radio station. Anyway, must set the alarm for midday, see ya later.

One evening, with Xmas just days away, a woman came around the depot with a clipboard and took random people upstairs for a chat. She blanked me but Brian was pulled aside.

“She asked me if I wanted a full-time job,” he later explained in his soft, couldn’t-give-a-shit-‘bout-nothing-Californian burr.

“Ah ha ha,” I replied “As if! Did you tell her to stick it?”

“I’m starting in January!” he laughed. “January 2nd actually.”

I guess he didn’t have to work in my section, to be fair. But then I thought: why didn’t she ask *me*? Stupid cow. I had no clue that I’d become a Parcelforce full-timer just two-and-a-half years later. Be careful what you *etc etc*.

After my final Xmas shift at Battersea Park, we went straight from the depot to a pub in Peckham that was hosting a karaoke contest – all the rage in pubs back then. £50 was up for grabs. A girl in jodhpurs did an incredible version of Gabrielle’s *Dreams* – even I, a tone-deaf Conflict fan, could appreciate her tremendous vocal talent – but she was pipped to the post by some godawful, weird-looking geriatric using the name ‘Tom Cruise’, who just roared and hollered tunelessly into the mic, butchering *Rhinestone Cowboy*.

I was convinced it was a fix. “*How the fuck did **he** win?? She was **WAY** better!*” I hissed at Brian – loudly enough, evidently, for Tom Cruise’s mother to hear.

Turned out ‘Tom’ was 20 and had a serious degenerative disease. We never went back. ☠☠☠

The antagonism became too volatile to diffuse. Hostility and outright bitchiness seeped into and poisoned the well. We both threatened Ben with violence on numerous occasions. One major grievance was that BT had disconnected us after Ben had booked two months' worth of automated daily wake-up calls at £2 a ring, and then wouldn't pay the bill. Another was that he was a total cunt.

Moira became convinced the flat was haunted. This was mostly down to the loons next door stomping around in the attic space that spanned both of our flats, but Brian and I were happy to encourage her supernatural delusions, figuring this might spook her into moving out. So, we'd pretend we'd seen spectral, humanoid forms lurking on the stairs and heard sinister whispers late at night. Kicking a hole in the living room wall wasn't one of Brian's best moves though, to put it mildly. I mean, I guess a poltergeist *could've* done it...but it was hardly the *Gaslight* effect we were aiming for. Besides, Ben and Moira just assumed *I'd* done it and threatened to grass me to the landlord.

One night, I was playing pool (badly) down the pub with Zombie Nick. He had a lobotomy scar and an unrequited crush on Zoe – the two phenomena may have been linked. "What were you lot doing in the attic?" I asked him. "It sounded like you were going to crash through the ceiling."

"Zoe wants to move up there," Nick snorted. "She told me to move her mattress in, but it won't fit!" He became agitated. "There's no way I can get it up there! Then she went mental and swore at me and said she'd move in with a sleeping bag and her stereo."

That was it: I *had* to move out. Brian was of the same mind. A while later, the landlord gave us no choice: he *flipped his lid* after popping round for a random flat inspection. The bannister was down to two rails; me and Brian had used the others as bats during impromptu baseball games (with a tennis ball). The kitchen sink resembled a wet market, with new pathogen strains bubbling beneath never-washed pots and plates. There was the hole in the living room wall...discarded warning letters from BT's appointed bailiffs...and *Moira's room*. An ankle-deep swamp of scattered clothes and crusty underwear... pint glasses full of dog-ends, floating in murky black water...plates caked with mould and hardened curry sauce...bin bags filled with trash that she couldn't be bothered to take out... empty vodka bottles ... an overflowing cat litter tray...umpteenth back issues of *The Face* and *Marie Claire*, seemingly dropped into the room from a Chinook... and more perfume than a Dubai shopping mall. And beneath it all, a banging maggot disco on the ash burn-riddled carpet.

We weren't getting our deposits back, apparently.

The end was nigh; the gods of chaos turned up in force. One evening, Zoe, Nick and Spencer gobbled down some microdots and jumped the first rocket ship to Saturn – or, more accurately, to the balcony outside our kitchen window, where they swayed and teetered dangerously close to the edge of The Rat Pit. Brian, Andy and I suddenly found ourselves babysitting our frazzled neighbours.

Taking them out onto Camberwell Church Street on a Friday night 'to walk it off' *wasn't* a good idea. We were drawing way too much unwanted attention to ourselves. This wasn't helped by our acid casualty toddlers attempting to wade into the traffic. If you've ever seen *Dead Man's Shoes*, imagine the drug scene but with passing cars blasting Tupac, and you're close. Zoe's carefully cultivated 'wacky free spirit' persona totally dissolved as she clung to a lamp post, bawling her eyes out. Soon after, she ended up having a fling with Spencer, causing Nick to move out in a lovesick huff. Spencer then conned her – or rather her rich, thick parents – out of several grand and did a runner. ☠☠☠

Ben and Moira split and went their separate ways, 10 months too late for my liking. Still smarting from our withheld deposits and the landlord's threats of a kicking, Brian, Andy and I decided to end our tenancy with a bang – and host a FAREWELL FLAT-TRASHING PARTY!

The night went as badly as expected. Brian carved a massive *USA* into a wall with a craft knife while Andy and I smashed up what was left of the banister. I don't know who invited the Polish ex-army bloke, who spent ages ranting about communism being 'bullshit' before passing out on the carpet, but he tossed the oven door into The Rat Pit. Zombie Nick walked around the flat unscrewing lightbulbs, to take back home as 'spares': can't fault his cost-efficiency. Though I did have to impress on him (repeatedly) that ***actually torching the flat*** *wasn't* a great idea.

"Thought you said this was a wrecking party," he moaned. I wondered if he'd have been as keen on arson if he'd still lived next door. What a stupid question – *of course he would've*.

Sadly, the anticipated night of unbridled debauchery fizzled out prematurely after Andy popped down to the offie, chatted up two girls on the street and invited them back. The girls hung around, smiled, socialised... and then nicked all the booze and scarpered, shortly before 11pm. We had an emergency whip-round on the balcony and informed our disgusted guests that we were going to buy some more – the party had only just begun! In fact, we were EVEN gonna...

CLACK. Total blackout.

Everyone filed out the front door as we whipped out cigarette lighters and tried to assure them it wouldn't take *that* long to recharge the meter key. Nobody listened. Groping around for our jackets, we jumped the bus to The Fridge in Brixton, where I remember cans of Guinness, white rastas, a lot of gabba and techno, and not much else. I woke up around 8am, next to my bag – packed and ready to scam. The Polish bloke had also risen and was busy dismantling the electric meter. It was time to leave before the landlord sent the boys round. ☠☠☠

Brian stayed in touch for a while, though our contact eventually dwindled to nothing. We'd send each other the tackiest Xmas cards we could find, usually jazzed up with biro scrawls of spurting peni and skulls. He'd cover the envelopes with crude Post Office in-jokes (including some pedantic advice we'd been given about postcodes) which didn't go down well at BM My Parents' Place.

He then moved to Glasgow where he rejoined the Post Office (you never really leave) and became a regular at Celtic Park. He then moved back to Ventura and started his own healthcare supply business, providing home-grown herbal remedies to people with arthritis and MS, if you catch my drift. From what I hear, he was pretty damn good at this and quite the entrepreneur.

It was an interesting cultural exchange, but it might have been better if we'd had more money, space and options – and slightly nicer flatmates. And if I'd been a bit more mature, truth be told. Me and Brian would sit in the dark, chain-smoking and watching the Channel 4 youthsplotation programme *Passengers*; the tacky intro sequence beamed us images of wild highways, glossy teeth and truckloads of edgy, exciting adventures. Meanwhile, we had nicotine addiction, maggots, tramp juice and The Rat Pit. But, tonight, as the UK rises up to show them bleedin' Europeans we **won't** be beaten in the death toll stakes...*no fuckin' way, José!*... let me pour out a Stella for Brian K, my old mucker and ex-flatmate, who died in California in April 2020.

REVIEWS

Sorry, KonMari: I tried to make this work but I'm *not* binning those back issues of *Bugs and Drugs*, OR buying your \$75 tuning fork (to enhance my 'tidying-up vibrations'). I'm hanging out with Risa and Alisha at **JapanesePod101** now, anyway. Learning Japanese hurts my head but it'll be worth it when I *finally* track down that underground pet shop in Shibuya that sells 'sumo macaques'. Will cost a bomb keeping them fed and diapered, but I'm saving a fair whack on reduced tube commutes these days – and who doesn't want to watch 15-stone baby monkeys having a barney? I promise not to become one of those irritating roundeye pricks who randomly drops Japanese into casual chat.

I last went to North London goff club **Slimelight** in 2005, accompanied by Mark 'K-Punk' Fisher and Nina Power – straight after a Sutcliffe Jugend gig. Is that the mother of all sentences to piss off Antifa Twitter? I'll be spilling more beans on THAT sordid night in my physical zine – *OUT SOON!* Did I say 2005? I meant last Saturday, when I caught a Slimelight set on Twitch. Top cheap night out: DJ BLACKDEATH 1334, beer and 200 goths in chat requesting Bauhaus and Nitzer Ebb. The deej had rigged up a 'cat cam' in her flat:



Image may contain: a goth; a cat; Holy Mary, Mother Of God

Unfortunately, the beer went down WAY too easily with the deathrock and I got smashed off my face for the second time since lockdown started. Which is pretty much what happened whenever I went to Slimelight for real, so a nice touch of authenticity there! Just needed a goth chick to tell me "*Fuck off, normie*" and the experience would have been complete.

I also caught Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, as screened by the Open University in 1976, on BoobTube. Yeah, really...it exists! In my trolleyed state, though, I ended up squinting at Ma Ubu, asking myself: *is that Pauline Fowler?* A classic, natch, but the performance could have done with a bit more shouting and filth. It was better than the 1980 disaster flick *Virus*, in which *the Italian flu* wipes out the world. The bit with the baby skeleton in the pushchair was cool, though. I also liked the film's 'newsflashes' from England, featuring riots and people running around on fire – rather than queues outside Tesco and slappable jolly types hosting street karaoke parties. Still, we're only in May, give it time.

Book-wise, last week's highlights were *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said* by **PKD** – no clue why he never got his own *RE/SEARCH* compendium, nor made it onto Genesis P-Orridge's 'cool list' – and *Hotel Insomnia* by **Charles Simic**. Meanwhile, the ever-reliable DJs Bunnyhausen and Sarma continue to host **Slav To The Rhythm** at the [neonhospice.com](http://theneonhospice.com) most Sunday evenings – highlights of the last set included **La Card**'s *Jedno Zbogom Za Tebe* (transl: さようなら) which could have easily snuck its way into one of the Cybernetic Broadcasting System's legendary Top 100s. Could *murder* a doner kebab right now, by the way. More high culture next time! (MARTIN C)

10 MAY

8.30PM

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STAPPERTON

“as if elaine radigue had released a tape on broken flag” - josh peterson

CONCRETE/FIELD

“like a lawnmower drowning itself in a sea of jelly” - attn.magazine

XYLITOL

“the brutal minimalism of grime, coldwave and the stoics of krautrock” - RA

OLLIJOHANNA

“the sounds of distant explosions and their aftermath” - idwal fisher

COLDSORE

“echo and reverb in the snow” - turbulent times

LIBBE MATZ GANG

“primitive murky computer electronics” - simon morris

TWITCH.TV/DISCO_INSOLENCE